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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. AND TAIWAN'S STATUS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused May 13 news coverage on the Taiwan government's decision to open up 99 sectors in manufacturing, services and public works to Chinese investment; on whether Taiwan's representative to the U.S. Jason Yuan received U.S. permanent residency; and on the first anniversary of the Ma Ying-jeou Administration. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed piece in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," written by John Tkacik, a retired U.S. Foreign Service Officer, discussed the recent remarks by a Japanese representative to Taiwan on the island's "undetermined" status and the U.S. government's position on this issue. The article concluded by saying that "[I]n the end, a doctrine of Taiwan's 'undetermined' status is the only formulation under international law that might permit Taiwan to exist separately from the PRC. It is the only formula that permits the major democracies of the world -- the US, Japan, the UK, Canada and Australia, to name a few -- to maintain their support of Taiwan's democracy in the face of Chinese accusations of 'gross interference in China's domestic affairs.'" End summary.

"Taiwan's 'Undetermined' Status"

John Tkacik, a retired U.S. Foreign Service Officer and former chief of China intelligence at the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the first Clinton Administration, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (5/13):

"It is hard to believe that retired ambassador Saito Masaki, head of the Japan Interchange Association (JIA), Tokyo's de facto embassy in Taipei, would deliver himself of so profound a 'personal' observation as 'Taiwan's status is unsettled' without instructions from his government. With the Taipei government increasingly inclined to define Taiwan as China's sovereign territory, it's no wonder Japan is alarmed. Taiwanese themselves should be alarmed. Taiwan's post-World War II 'undetermined' international status, an explicit artifact of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, is after all the metaphysical nucleus of Japan's relationship with Taiwan. It is the core precept in the US' relationship with Taiwan as well. ...

"Americans make similar 'misstatements,' but not so elegantly or so well thought-out. In August 2007, Dennis Wilder, then US president George W. Bush's senior Asia adviser, allowed his tongue to slip in a direction just the opposite of Saito's -- but botched it completely: 'Taiwan, or the Republic of China,' he stammered, 'is not at this point a state in the international community.' He then confused the issue by adding: 'The position of the United States government is that the ROC -- Republic of China -- is an issue undecided, and it has been left undecided, as you know, for many, many years.' Wrong, wrong, and (oh my!) wrong again. The 'Republic of China' does not exist in US eyes. The PRC succeeded the ROC as 'China.' As far as the US government is concerned, there is only one China and the PRC is China's sole legal government. Period. There is nothing 'undecided' about the US position on the 'ROC' at all, I'm afraid. ...

"Ironically, shortly before Wilder's infelicitous utterance, Taiwan's 'undetermined' status was restated strongly and authoritatively by US diplomats to UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe, who presumably needed no reminding since he had once served as director of the American Institute in Taiwan. ... Taiwanese should be comforted. The US government is (still) willing to stick its neck out and remind the UN of Taiwan's 'undetermined' status; and Japan's ambassador Saito is willing to draw fire to remind the Taiwanese people of their 'undetermined' status. They do not engage in this behavior merely for the fun of belaboring the minutiae of international law left over from the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951. They do it to remind the Taiwanese people that the Chinese civil war is over, and that the communists won. There is no rational excuse for Taiwan's government to continue the fiction that it is the government of all China, or to pronounce that Taiwan's interpretation of 'one China' is -- as President Ma Ying-jeou has postulated -- the ROC. ...

"In the end, a doctrine of Taiwan's 'undetermined' status is the only formulation under international law that might permit Taiwan to exist separately from the PRC. It is the only formula that permits the major democracies of the world -- the US, Japan, the UK, Canada and Australia, to name a few -- to maintain their support of Taiwan's democracy in the face of Chinese accusations of 'gross interference in China's domestic affairs.' Saito's gentle reminder that Japan -- at least -- still does not recognize China's sovereign claims to Taiwan was indeed his 'personal opinion' -- but it is also that of the Japanese government -- and the US government as well. Taiwan's government and ruling party must not make it more difficult for the world's democracies to support Taiwan than it already is."

YOUNG